

BUFFALO, NEW YORK
NEWS

E - 281,982

NOV 14 1975

Job Description for a CIA Boss

Some congressional reactions to President Ford's choice of George Bush to succeed William Colby as head of the CIA are most ironic. For not only are various Democratic presidential aspirants acting as if anyone that politically ambitious has no business running anything as sensitive as the CIA, but one of those evidently hoping to make his CIA investigation a launching pad for yet another presidential bid, Sen. Church (D., Ida.), now talks of leading a Senate fight against confirming Mr. Bush because he is "a past chairman of the Republican Party."

While our own view was that Mr. Bush's partisan background was a weakness rather than a strength among his otherwise creditable credentials for this sensitive post, we must disagree emphatically with any implication that the simple act of having been a national party chairman is in itself a disqualification for other high office.

What is really needed here is a concept of what kind of director the CIA does need, at this beleaguered stage of its history, to pull it back into top effectiveness after the many shock waves of current investigations have finally run their course. What Sen. Church thinks it needs is someone without political ambitions who can "stand up to the President and fight for the facts as his agency sees them." But if that means a director up from the ranks who is a part of the "old boy network" that has brought the CIA to its present impasse, then we would have to dissent.

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One thing the CIA in our view definitely does need, with all respect for Mr. Colby's able service under unusual stress, is a new broom — a man from the outside who does NOT have a lot of internal ties and has had no part in any past CIA infighting. That person should have had some contact with the effects of the

CIA's work abroad, and should be likewise sensitive to the abuses of its powers and mandate here at home. He should also have the full personal confidence of the President — whose agent he must primarily be in reorganizing and disciplining the CIA to see that it does not again get out of line. He should also have some understanding of Congress and a tested ability to maintain close liaison with its intelligence oversight committees — especially during the period when it will be vital for the CIA to re-establish its credibility with both Congress and the public.

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If one agrees with that job description, then it is not a bad fit for George Bush. He is an outsider but with substantial exposure to CIA work in his role as U.N. ambassador and more recently as our man in Peking. His background in Congress should help him shore up the CIA image there. His personal capacities are so highly regarded in the White House that he was a serious contender for the vice presidency when that office finally went to Nelson Rockefeller. His closeness to the President assures him both ready access to the Ford ear and strong Ford backing in any necessary shakeups within the CIA.

So if this is the man President Ford now wants as his trouble-shooting head of the CIA, he should have him. But we do hope that once Mr. Bush is confirmed, he will put aside all political considerations and ambition and just concentrate on making the CIA once again the kind of effective, disciplined and respected intelligence gathering agency that our national security so clearly requires. And the sooner those rival congressional investigating committees can conclude their wide-ranging probes and bring forth a responsible set of findings and recommendations, the sooner that necessary rebuilding process can be expedited.